

WHAT IS Smart Growth?

More Choices—Better Places

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



In 1997, the State of Maryland agreed on a set of groundbreaking policies and programs aimed at solving the problems of sprawl. The Smart Growth initiative, adopted as a series of laws that spring, was built around the recognition that growth is inevitable—in fact, it is vital for a healthy economy. But this new way of thinking also acknowledged that the State could no longer afford to support development anywhere and everywhere, at any cost. The initiative set three straightforward goals:

- To support and revitalize existing communities by targeting State resources to support development in areas where the infrastructure is already in place or will soon be in place;
- To preserve the State's most valuable farmland and critical natural resources before they are forever lost;
- To save taxpayers millions of dollars in the unnecessary cost of building the infrastructure required by sprawling development.

Smart Growth focuses on how and where the State spends its money. In some parts of the country, the state controls where growth can go by regulating local land-use decisions. Maryland

is trying a different approach, using financial incentives to influence those decisions.

Today, State agencies provide funding for new highways, water and sewer and other growth-related needs only in Priority Funding Areas, which include established communities and locally designated growth areas. Local governments and private land trusts have identified, and the State has certified, Rural Legacy Areas containing important agricultural land and natural resources that are threatened by development. In those areas, Maryland is spending more money to protect farms, forests, historic sites and stream buffers that filter pollution from runoff as it drains into major waterways, including the Chesapeake Bay.

By rewarding better land-use practices, Maryland is beginning to reverse the trends of the 20th Century, when the State inadvertently subsidized sprawl through highway building and other programs. Today, the emphasis is on reinvesting in older cities, towns and suburbs and maintaining rural landscapes, while promoting more choice in housing and transportation.

This vision of smarter growth heralds a better quality of life, a strong economy and a healthy environment for future generations.



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Ten Things You and Your Family Can do for Smart Growth

- 1 **Talk to your city or county planners** to learn how local land use and zoning decisions are made and study the long-term growth plan for your area. Keep up with the agendas for public hearings and attend city or county council meetings. Providing constructive comments regarding comprehensive plans, zoning regulations, and development proposals is a good opportunity to sway decisions affecting how your community will grow. Keep in mind that it is important to support well-designed compact development, particularly in town centers, that helps preserve green space and makes transit viable.
- 2 **Consider forming or joining a citizens' organization** focused on community planning, revitalization and growth-related issues. Encourage local schools to get involved in neighborhood improvement projects.
- 3 **Learn about "BayScaping"** techniques. Landscaping with native plants will reduce runoff from your yard and the need for harmful lawn chemicals. If you live anywhere within the watershed of the Chesapeake Bay, both are critical to restoring its health.
- 4 **Help make your neighborhoods more walkable** by lobbying local officials for sidewalks on at least one side of every street and crosswalks and pedestrian signals at major intersections. Support other improvements—landscaping, bike lanes, benches or new lighting at public gathering spots—to make walking more appealing.
- 5 **Cut back on driving** by getting in the habit of combining your household errands as often as possible, maybe even sharing these trips with a friend. Keep a travel diary to look for these opportunities.
- 6 **Urge your elected representatives** to support more transit and try walking or biking as often as possible for trips you ordinarily make by car. When driving is necessary, be aware of bicyclists and pedestrians.
- 7 **Talk to your employer** about "Tele-work" options to find out if you can work at home some days. Alternatively, explore the possibility of flex-time to avoid rush-hour traffic.
- 8 **When buying a home**, think about transportation and other life-style aspects of community design. In choosing a neighborhood, people often fail to consider commuting costs, which increase with auto dependence. Higher housing costs can be offset by savings on vehicle costs if you live close to work, shopping and other needs. The other factor to consider is the increase in leisure time.
- 9 **Volunteer with local historic preservation groups**, land trusts and conservation organizations, environmental groups and other Smart Growth advocates.
- 10 **Support locally owned shops and restaurants** in your neighborhood and visit farmers markets. Helping small businesses and family farms remain profitable strengthens the local economy and helps rural areas stay rural.

The Smart Growth Map

Before Smart Growth, if a project was eligible for State financial assistance, its location was rarely questioned. After Smart Growth, however, State financial support for growth projects is only permitted in designated growth areas, called Priority Funding Areas, or PFAs. Economic development loans or grants, sewer and water funding, transportation projects, the placement of State facilities and other growth-related

expenditures are restricted to PFAs. Local governments may still approve growth outside of PFAs, but State financial assistance for such projects is prohibited. To stem the development pressures spreading outward from Maryland's oldest towns and cities, the Smart Growth initiative also established the Rural Legacy Program to identify and permanently protect the State's best remaining farms and natural areas.

Priority Funding Areas **Rural Legacy** **Protected Lands**

State funding for growth is targeted to Priority Funding Areas. All 157 incorporated municipalities are PFAs, as are areas inside the Baltimore and Washington beltways. Counties may designate additional PFAs as long as they meet State criteria for water and sewer, density, and consistency with growth projections.

The Rural Legacy Program permanently protects large, contiguous tracts of land that feature multiple resources, such as farms, forests, waterway buffers, or historical sites threatened by development. Willing landowners work with local sponsors to compete for State funds to purchase development rights on targeted properties.

Land is protected in Maryland in several ways. In addition to the Rural Legacy Program, parkland is acquired through Program Open Space; farmland is protected through the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation; farmland, forest, and significant natural resources are protected through the donation of conserva-

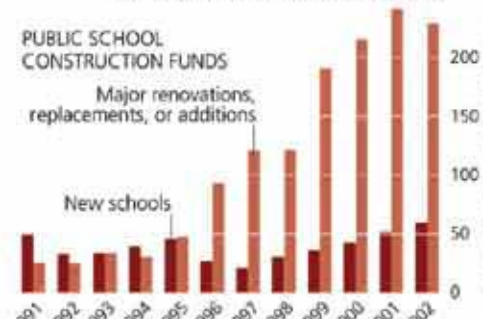
tion easements to the Maryland Environmental Trust; and the most ecologically significant lands are protected through the GreenPrint Program.

Rejuvenating Baltimore

Community revitalization takes many forms. It can involve cleaning up contaminated industrial sites and returning them to productive use, or refurbishing historic buildings and homes. Neighborhoods can be invigorated by transit projects and renovations of older schools. Sometimes, it is as simple as sprucing up a park or putting in sidewalks, ornamental lighting and benches to encourage walking.

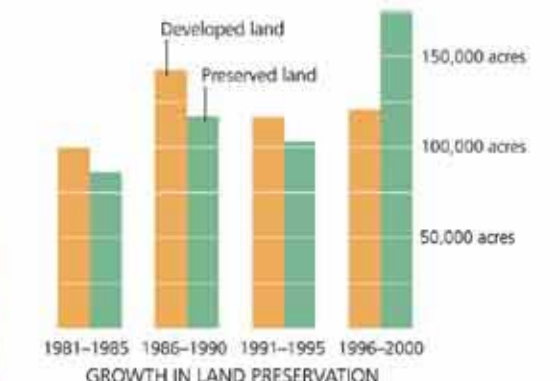
Throughout the Baltimore metropolitan area, projects backed by Smart Growth incentives are transforming older communities. In the city, developers are spending millions to redevelop abandoned factories and commercial buildings with help from State tax credits, brownfields cleanup assistance and other programs.

One significant shift under Smart Growth has been the renewed effort to renovate, expand and reconstruct older, long neglected schools. A decade ago, nearly \$6 out of every \$10 the State spent on school construction went to build new schools, primarily in the expanding suburbs. Now, under Smart Growth, about \$8 out of every \$10 the State spends on school construction goes to older schools in older neighborhoods.



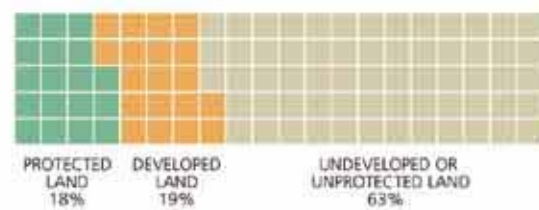
Land Preservation Success

In six of the last seven years, land preservation programs and high funding levels contributed to this success.



The GreenPrint Program

GreenPrint is a scientifically-based effort to protect Maryland's most ecologically valuable lands—a linked network of forests and parks, greenways and wetlands. This "green infrastructure" is vital for the survival of wildlife and native plants and contributes to cleaner air and water.



A toolkit of Smart Growth Programs

Critical Areas
Land within 1,000 feet of the shoreline of the Chesapeake Bay, Coastal Bays, and all tidal tributaries is designated as a "Critical Area" worthy of special protection. The shoreline and adjacent lands are part of a fragile estuarine system that can be adversely impacted by human activity, population growth and development.

Smart Codes
Existing building and zoning codes often frustrate Smart Growth development. "Smart Codes" is an effort to reexamine and re-write outdated state and local codes to encourage re-use of older buildings, infill development and construction of compact, mixed-use new development.

Neighborhood Business Development Program
The Neighborhood Business Development Program stimulates investment in Maryland's older communities. This Department of Housing and Community Development program helps develop or expand small businesses and nonprofit organizations in designated neighborhoods and invests in revitalizing small businesses.

Neighborhood Conservation

The Department of Transportation's Neighborhood Conservation initiative helps revitalize communities by improving traffic flow, increasing pedestrian mobility and safety, and connecting people to transit. The program provides sidewalks, streetlights, park benches and landscaping to improve the attractiveness of older downtown business districts.

Community Legacy
Community Legacy is a competitive program that funds projects in communities that can demonstrate both evidence of decline and signs of strength. Applications must include a comprehensive revitalization plan. This Department of Housing and Community Development program is meant to complement other existing revitalization programs.

Community Parks and Playgrounds
The Parks and Playgrounds initiative assures that residents of older, more densely populated neighborhoods

have access to quality parks and playgrounds. This Department of Natural Resources program provides grants to local governments to install playground equipment, restore existing parks and create new parks in cities and towns.

Rural Legacy
The Rural Legacy Program was created to assure a rural legacy for future generations. Applying landowners, working with local governments and land trusts, compete for State funds to protect large, contiguous tracts of natural, agricultural or forest land in designated Rural Legacy Areas threatened by development.

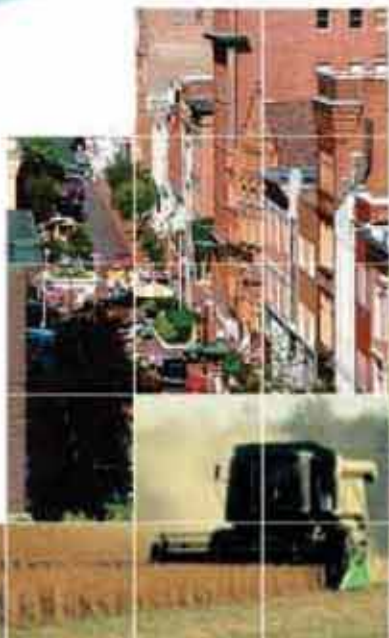
Agricultural Zoning, Baltimore County
Strong conservation zoning is key to making Smart Growth work.

Baltimore County protects farmland by permitting one house for every 50 acres in areas zoned for agriculture. County prohibits public water and sewer extensions into areas outside an Urban-Rural Demarcation Line, which separates low-density agricultural land from higher density development.

Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit Policy, Montgomery County

Sprawl often leads to economic segregation: concentrations of poverty, social stress and scant resources, and concentrations of wealth, places affordable only to a small segment

of society. Montgomery County addresses this inequity by requiring that 12.5 to 15% of the units in new developments of 50 homes or more be affordable to low and moderate-income households. This Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit policy helps ensure that people with different levels of economic means can live and work together in the same place. In exchange, developers are allowed to build more homes than otherwise allowed by zoning.



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